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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted of Minnesota families of students with disabilities (n=60) and without disabilities (n=60), and responses were compared to identify practices related to public school choice. Results indicated that the media were the primary source of information for families of general education students, while principals and teachers were the main source for special education students. Primary reasons for changing schools were quality of services, the new school's location, academic and athletic reputation, course variety, and climate for learning. For the most part, the reasons for transfer identified by families of students with and without disabilities were similar. School personnel seldom participated in transfer decisions by families of students without disabilities, but were heavily involved in such decisions for students with disabilities. Families of students with disabilities reported school visits as being helpful in making the enrollment decision more often than did families of students without disabilities. Families of students with disabilities reported more improvement in academic performance than did other families. Family involvement for both groups remained relatively constant after the enrollment change. (Contains 26 references.) (JDD)

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A Comparison of Families of Students With and Without Disabilities Who Use Open Enrollment Options to Transfer Schools

Research Report No. 8

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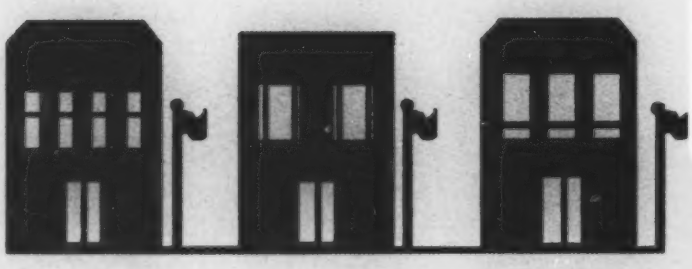

Enrollment Options for Students with Disabilities

James E. Ysseldyke, Cheryl M. Lange, and Bob Algozzine

The College of Education
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

August, 1992

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Abstract

Public school choice is among the strategies identified by national policy makers for improving education by the year 2000 and beyond. Despite the popularity of choice as an educational reform alternative, little is known about how choice operates nationally and what effects it may have in particular areas of the country with particular groups of students. We conducted a cross-sectional survey to identify facts and opinions about selected aspects of contemporary practices related to choice. Responses from families of students with disabilities were compared to responses of a similar group of families of students without disabilities. The following research questions were addressed: (1) What kinds of information about choice do school districts provide and how useful is it? (2) What procedures do school districts use to inform families about choice and how useful are the procedures? (3) What issues and concerns about choice are most salient for students with disabilities and their families? This work provides a strong foundation for addressing policy concerns related to improving education programs and provides information for school personnel as they work to improve the quality of educational services for students with disabilities.

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A Comparison Of Families Of Students With And Without Disabilities Who Use Open Enrollment Options To Transfer Schools

The most comprehensive and sustained reform efforts in American education since the introduction of the common school were launched in the decade of the 80's (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 1992). The period culminated with the President and the nation's governors proposing national goals and with the President's education reform strategy being widely disseminated in the AMERICA 2000 document. Recommendations of AMERICA 2000 fall into four broad categories of strategies: those related to helping teachers, to developing "new American schools, to assessment and meeting "new world-class standards" for educational achievement, and to improving schools through parental choice (Howe, 1991). Less is said about choice than any other area addressed in AMERICA 2000, but the extent and heat of nationwide discussion of this option more than make up for the short shrift provided in this important document (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Clinchy, 1991; Doyle, 1991; Howe, 1991; Sewall, 1991; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 1992).

What Questions Drive Reform and Practice?

Little concern has been expressed about the effects of school choice options on students with special learning needs (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 1992). Issues related to the effects of enrollment options on students with disabilities can be organized into four groups: (1) issues for students who transfer within districts (2) issues for students who transfer between districts, (3) issues for districts experiencing large increases (or

decreases) in the number of special education students, and (4) issues for personnel preparation professionals.

When students with disabilities transfer within their local school district; administrators, school psychologists, parents, teachers, and the students themselves will have much to consider. For example, what special transportation difficulties are encountered by students who transfer in large rural or urban districts? Do schools make changes in programs to attract (or repel) influxes of students with serious disabilities? Are programs for these students substantively or superficially different? To what extent do the transfers change demand for special education teachers, school psychologists, and paraprofessionals? To what extent does the transfer of students with disabilities change demand for support personnel? To what extent does school choice change demand for special education assessments and reevaluations? Will groups of students with different disabilities participate similarly in all enrollment options? Will "magnet schools" or those that have long lists of applications for transfer be as willing to accommodate students with disabilities as those who are non-disabled? How do districts manage too many requests for particularly popular teachers or schools?

Transferring between districts (i.e., open enrollment) will likely create a different but related set of challenges. Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Algozzine, and Nathan (1991) pointed to the following kinds of issues, fears, and concerns. As districts gain and lose students with disabilities, do they also gain and lose

teachers? What effect does this have on professionalism and morale? Who pays excess costs for exceptional students who transfer between districts? What patterns of migration characterize movements of students with different types of disabilities? What special transportation difficulties are encountered by students who transfer between districts? What problems are created by differing eligibility criteria? Do districts make changes in programs to attract (or repel) influxes of students? To what extent does open enrollment change demand for support personnel and what they do?

Growth in learning disabilities has been a source of considerable concern for professionals in special education over the years (U. S. D. E., 1988). Clearly, large influxes of students with special learning needs create major challenges for local school districts and special education in general. Districts experiencing extraordinary growth in students with other disabilities will quickly have to address some of these concerns. Some administrative questions follow: How many students with special learning needs take advantage of open enrollment? Do students in some categories participate more frequently than students in other categories? Do children from particular types of families participate more frequently than children from others? Do students from particular types of schools participate more frequently than students from others? Does transfer make a difference in terms of academic engaged time and other instructional variables? How do parents of students with disabilities find out about open enrollment? How do schools

resolve questions of differences in competency testing, credit, and graduation requirements? What happens to students with disabilities who do not take advantage of open enrollment? Do some schools become repositories for students who are poor, minority, disabled, or very difficult to teach? Does open enrollment drive special education backward instead of forward with regard to improving services provided to students with severe disabilities?

If exceptional students can go anywhere for special education, how do professionals monitor who teaches them and the education they receive? When considering personnel preparation, to what extent should special educators be concerned with protectionism and parochialism? Who will teach students with disabilities? What perspectives will characterize training of these special education teachers? Does training have to change to reflect the possibility that teachers may work with a student only one year? Do teachers need to be trained to more carefully document interventions and outcomes for individual students so that a new district can make informed decisions when students transfer? Are new positions of supervision necessary to address district needs relative to open enrollment? Will the role of the school psychologist expand to meet the needs of the transferring students?

Grounding Reform In Research

Despite the presence of choice in educational discussions, Howe (1991) argues that this strategy for school improvement has generated "more heat than light" for several reasons. First, very

little is known about how choice works and what its effects may be in particular situations or with particular groups of students. Second, much of the literature about choice is based on the unproved theoretical argument that the schools are ineffective now and that choice is bound to yield improvements. And, third, most of the arguments in support of choice are not grounded in data generated by research. Howe also argues that "a very useful federal activity would be the support of some truly independent, longitudinal studies of the new choice activities that have emerged," concluding that "we really don't know enough about choice and its by-products" (p. 195).

In an attempt to shed some light on issues and concerns of national significance and conduct research on activities that address problems of national importance related to open enrollment, we studied opinions about choice for families of students with and without disabilities who transfer school districts. Demographic information as well as opinions about decision-making related to open enrollment and the effects on participating students exercising the open enrollment option were compared. The study was conducted in Minnesota because it is the first state to implement open enrollment practices.

Method

A survey of families participating in the Minnesota Open Enrollment Options Program was completed to identify issues and concerns of parents and professionals related to public school choice. Information related to decision-making and expectations

was examined for two groups of students participating in an open enrollment options program.

Participants

One hundred and twenty families with approved applications to change school districts participated in this research; sixty had checked an item on the survey indicating that the child in the program had a handicapping condition requiring an IEP. Information about specific special education categories assigned to these students was not available.

The child with a disability participating in the open enrollment program was the only one at home for about one third (37%) of the families. Very few participating families had 4 or more children living at home. Most (62%) of the participants were living in rural areas and the remainder of the sample was about evenly split between urban (18%) and suburban (20%) families. Ninety-five percent were white families with medium ($20-50,000) incomes. Most parents had educational experiences beyond high school.

The non-disabled child not indicating the need for an IEP participating in the open enrollment program was the only one at home for half of the families. Very few participating families had 4 or more children living at home. About half (48%) of the participants were living in rural areas and the distribution was not evenly split between urban (18%) and suburban (33%) families. Ninety-one percent were white families with medium ($20-50,000) incomes. Most parents had educational experiences beyond high school. Additional demographic information on families

participating in the research is presented in Table 1. For the most part, their demographic characteristics were similar.

Procedures

Families using Open Enrollment Options were required to submit a standard, state-developed application form to the district of their choice on or before January 1 of the year in which they wished to enroll in a nonresident district. Residents of Duluth, Minneapolis, and St. Paul could apply to change districts at any time during the year. Approved applications were submitted to the state Department of Education and served as a database for subsequent research. The Minnesota Department of Education conducted a mail survey of over 2,600 participants' families in the Open Enrollment Options Program to obtain preliminary information on the use and impact of choice. Data obtained from sixty families with students who had individualized education programs were compared to those from sixty families of students with no known handicapping conditions.

Instrument

Four types of information were gathered in the pencil and paper survey used in this research. In addition to general demographic information about the respondents, the survey included items related to sources of information about open enrollment, family decision-making related to open enrollment, and the effects of exercising the open enrollment option on participating students. Most items required respondents to indicate opinions by checking multiple-choice options (e.g., From what sources did you obtain information...? Which of the following problems, if any,

Table 1

Demographic Characteristic Of Families Responding To Survey

Variable	Families Of Students With Disabilities n	%	Families Of Students Without Disabilities n	%
School Aged Children At Home				
1	22	(37)	30	(50)
2	19	(32)	20	(33)
3	16	(27)	7	(12)
4	2	(3)	2	(3)
5	1	(2)	1	(2)
Relation To Children				
Parent	57	(97)	60	(100)
Other Relative	0	(0)	0	(0)
Legal Guardian	2	(3)	0	(0)
Other	0	(0)	0	(0)
Home Living Area				
Urban	11	(18)	11	(18)
Suburban	12	(20)	20	(33)
Rural	37	(62)	29	(48)
Ethnic Background				
White	57	(95)	55	(91)
Black	0	(0)	0	(0)
Hispanic	2	(3)	1	(2)
Asian	0	(0)	1	(2)
American Indian	1	(2)	2	(3)
Other	0	(0)	1	(2)
Education				
Father				
Less than high school	0	(0)	4	(7)
High school	22	(43)	15	(28)
Some college	17	(23)	13	(24)
Four years of college	6	(12)	5	(9)
More than four years	6	(12)	17	(32)

Table 1 (continued)

Demographic Characteristic Of Families Responding To Survey

Variable	Families Of Students With Disabilities n	%	Families Of Students Without Disabilities n	%
Education				
Mother				
Less than high school	0	(0)	1	(2)
High school	17	(30)	14	(25)
Some college	30	(53)	20	(36)
Four years of college	2	(4)	9	(16)
More than four years	8	(14)	12	(21)
Income				
Below $10,000	1	(2)	3	(6)
$10-20,000	9	(17)	7	(14)
$20-30,000	13	(25)	11	(21)
$30-40,000	12	(23)	14	(27)
$40-50,000	11	(21)	12	(33)
Over $50,000	6	(12)	5	(10)

Note. Number in parenthesis is percent of respondents answering original item. Not every respondent answered every item.

did you encounter...?). Several Likert-type items were included (e.g., What was the level of agreement between you and your child...?) and three open-ended items were included (e.g., What is ... program's greatest strength?).

Research Questions

The following specific research questions were addressed for families of students with and without disabilities:

Information Sources

1. Where do families who participate in open enrollment obtain information about programs?
2. What problems do families who participate in open enrollment encounter trying to obtain information?
3. What information is available and helpful to families who decide to transfer under open enrollment options?

Decision-Making

1. Who first decides that open enrollment options should be pursued?
2. What topics related to open enrollment are discussed with students prior to participating in programs?
3. Why do families participate in open enrollment programs?
4. Who is involved in decision-making relative to open enrollment?
5. To what extent do family members agree regarding decisions to participate in open enrollment?
6. To what extent does the home school provide assistance to families of students who participate in open enrollment?

7. What information is available and helpful to families who decide to transfer under open enrollment options?
8. To what extent are students pressured to stay or recruited to leave under open enrollment programs?

Expectations

1. To what extent do behaviors change for students who participate in open enrollment programs?
2. To what extent are families active in school business prior to participating in open enrollment?
3. To what extent are families active in school business after participating in open enrollment?

Results

Information sources for families participating in the Open Enrollment Options Program are listed in Table 2; percentages of participants indicating they used a source as well as percents indicating their "most valuable source" are provided. More than 30 percent of the families indicated that the media and school principals provided information about the program; principals were considered the "one most valuable source" of information by 28 percent of families of students with disabilities and only 12 percent of families of students without disabilities. The media was the primary source of information for families of general class students and principals and teachers were the main source for special education students.

Problems encountered by families of students with disabilities who participate in open enrollment are presented in

Table 2

Comparison Of Information Sources For Families Who Participate In Open Enrollment Options Program

Source	Families Of Students With Disabilities n = 60 %		Families Of Students Without Disabilities n = 60 %	
Teacher	22	(3)	7	(0)
Counselor	12	(0)	7	(3)
Principal	25	(28)	18	(12)
Child	12	(2)	17	(7)
Family Member/Relative	3	(4)	5	(3)
Friend/Neighbor	17	(5)	15	(5)
Employer	0	(3)	5	(5)
Social Worker	3	(0)	0	(0)
Brochure/Flyer	17	(0)	8	(0)
Newsletter	20	(3)	18	(3)
Media	37	(15)	37	(25)
Hotline	1	(0)	0	(0)
Meeting	5	(5)	3	(2)
Social Service Agency	5	(0)	0	(0)

Note. Number in parenthesis is percent who checked item as the "one most valuable source" of information. Respondents could choose more than one source.

Table 3. Most parents of students with (74%) and without (86%) disabilities indicated that they did not experience problems obtaining information. The only difficulty cited with frequency was one in which parents believed the home school was not helpful in providing them with information. Almost twice as many families of students with disabilities reported that the home school was not helpful; very few families indicated that the new school was not helpful.

Parents and guardians were reportedly first to have the idea to participate in the Open Enrollment Options Program. Sixteen percent of the families of students with an individualized education program reported that the participating child was first to have the idea; almost twice as many families of students without disabilities indicated the child was first to have the idea to transfer school programs. Other sources are shown in Table 4.

Topics discussed with students relative to participation in open enrollment are presented in Table 5. More than half the families of students with disabilities reported discussing transportation, education at home and new schools, social life, and extracurricular experiences. Most frequently discussed topics for families of students without disabilities were transportation and education at the new school. Education at home school, social life, and extracurricular experiences were discussed frequently (by about one third of the families), but less than for families of students with disabilities.

Table 3

Comparison Of Problems Encountered Obtaining Information By Families Who Participate In Open Enrollment Options Program

Problem	Families Of Students With Disabilities n = 58		Families Of Students Without Disabilities n = 58	
	n	%	n	%
Not Any	43	(74)	50	(86)
Took Long Time	2	(3)	1	(2)
Difficult To Understand	0	(0)	0	(0)
Inadequate/Inaccurate	3	(5)	2	(3)
Process Complicated	1	(2)	0	(0)
Home School Not Helpful	18	(31)	10	(17)
New School Not Helpful	1	(2)	1	(2)

Note. Number in parenthesis reflects percentage of families answering each item. Respondents could indicate more than one problem.

Table 4

Comparison Of Who First Had Idea To Participate In Open Enrollment Options Program

Source	Families Of Students With Disabilities n = 50 n	%	Families Of Students Without Disabilities n = 54 n	%
Mother/Father/Guardian(s)	38	(76)	39	(72)
Child/Children	8	(16)	15	(28)
School Principal(s)	1	(2)	0	(0)
Teacher(s)	0	(0)	0	(0)
School Counselor(s)	2	(4)	0	(0)
Friend(s)	1	(2)	0	(0)
Other Family Members	0	(0)	0	(0)
Other	0	(0)	0	(0)

Note. Number in parenthesis reflects percentage of families answering each item.

Table 5

Comparison Of Topics Discussed With Students Relative To Participation In Open Enrollment Options Program

Topics	Families Of Students With Disabilities n = 60 n	%	Families Of Students Without Disabilities n = 60 n	%
Transportation	35	(59)	37	(62)
Education At Home School	31	(52)	21	(35)
Education At New School	41	(70)	32	(53)
Social Life	40	(68)	23	(38)
Extracurricular Activities	31	(53)	22	(37)
Other	11	(19)	6	(10)
None, Child Too Young	6	(10)	11	(18)

Note. Number in parenthesis reflects percentage of families answering each item.

Less than half the parents of students without disabilities (43%) indicated that they thought the services their child received would be better as a result of a school transfer; only 7 percent listed this as their "most important" reason. The new school's location relative to home, academic and athletic reputation, course variety, and climate for learning were also among the primary reasons supplied by many parents for electing to change schools or districts under the Open Enrollment Program. Graduation requirements, extended day programs, and encouragement to stay in school were among the reasons selected by a few parents.

Reasons families participate in open enrollment are presented in Table 6. For the most part, the reasons for transfer identified by families of students with and without disabilities are similar. Yet, there are some differences between the two groups. Half of the families of students with disabilities indicated that their children transferred school because they believed services would be better; 23% identified this as their primary reason for transfer. The most frequent reason for transfer identified by these parents was a search for a positive climate for learning. The most frequent reason for transfer identified by parents of students without disabilities was that services would be better, yet the primary reason cited by these parents was the strong academic reputation of the receiving school.

Table 6

Comparison Of Reasons Families Transfer Students Via The Open Enrollment Options Program

Reasons	Families Of Students With Disabilities n = 60 %		Families Of Students Without Disabilities n = 60 %	
Location Of New School				
Closer To Home	20	(12)	28	(7)
Closer To Work	15	(3)	15	(5)
Friends Attend New School	25	(2)	18	(3)
Services Are Better	50	(23)	43	(7)
Strong Academic Reputation	42	(5)	27	(17)
More Course Variety	32	(5)	35	(5)
Extended Day Programs	3	(0)	3	(2)
More Parent Participation	18	(0)	10	(0)
Fewer Graduation Requirements	2	(0)	0	(0)
Better Athletics/Extracurricular	23	(2)	25	(0)
Previous School Board	33	(3)	25	(5)
New School Offers Fresh Start	35	(2)	3	(2)
New School Encouraging Staying	20	(0)	7	(0)
Positive Climate For Learning	57	(8)	40	(8)
Other	28	(5)	25	(8)

Note. Number in parenthesis is percent of respondents who checked item as "most important" reason. Respondents could choose more than one reason.

People reportedly involved in decisions to apply for school transfers are listed in Table 7. Parents and children were involved in most cases and school officials and teachers were included to a greater extent with families of students with disabilities.

The level of agreement between parents and children about applications to change schools was relatively high. There was disagreement about transfer in less than a fourth of the families (see Table 8).

Ratings of helpfulness of the home school/district are presented in Table 9. In making a decision to transfer, most families reported not seeking guidance from the district or former school. When they did seek assistance, most reported the school or district was not very helpful.

Kinds of information used in making decisions to transfer are presented in Table 10. Most families of students with disabilities (61%) reported school visits as being available and helpful in making a decision about participation in the Open Enrollment Program. Opportunities to talk with teachers and school profiles/brochures were also checked by at least 25 percent of these respondents. Fewer families of students without disabilities (37%) reported school visits as being helpful. Opportunities to talk with teachers were also rated as less useful by these parents. School profiles and brochures were more helpful than they were to families of students with disabilities.

Table 7

Comparison Of Who Was Involved In Decision To Transfer

Participants	Families Of Students With Disabilities n = 60 n	%	Families Of Students Without Disabilities n = 59 n	%
Mother/Father/Guardian(s)	50	(83)	53	(90)
Child/Children	36	(60)	32	(54)
School Principal(s)	20	(33)	5	(9)
Teacher(s)	10	(17)	2	(3)
School Counselor(s)	8	(13)	2	(3)
Friend(s)	8	(13)	7	(12)
Other Family Members	12	(20)	3	(5)
Other	8	(13)	2	(3)

Note. Number in parenthesis reflects percentage of respondents answering each item. Respondents could choose more than one person.

Table 8

Comparison Of Level Of Agreement With Regard To Decision To Transfer

Level of Agreement	Families Of Students With Disabilities n = 55		Families Of Students Without Disabilities n = 56	
	n	%	n	%
Parents Decided/Child Too Young	7	(13)	13	(33)
All Agreed	36	(66)	29	(52)
Parents Decided/Child Neutral	6	(11)	4	(7)
Parents Decided/Child Against	2	(4)	3	(5)
Parents Neutral/Child Wanted	4	(7)	7	(13)
Parents Against/Child Wanted	0	(0)	0	(0)

Note. Number in parenthesis reflects percentage of respondents answering each item.

Table 9

Comparison Of Helpfulness Of Home School

Helpfulness	Families Of Students With Disabilities n = 60		Families Of Students Without Disabilities n = 56	
	n	%	n	%
Did Not Seek Guidance	37	(62)	35	(64)
Very Helpful	7	(12)	9	(16)
Somewhat Helpful	1	(2)	2	(3)
Not Very Helpful	15	(25)	10	(18)

Note. Number in parenthesis reflects percentage of respondents answering each item.

Table 10

Comparison Of Kinds Of Information Used In Making Decision To Transfer

Source	Families Of Students With Disabilities n = 54		Families Of Students Without Disabilities n = 51	
	n	%	n	%
School Profiles/Brochures	14	(26)	19	(37)
Parent Meetings	8	(15)	7	(14)
Family/School Conferences	7	(13)	9	(18)
School Visits	33	(61)	19	(37)
Talk To Teachers	19	(35)	8	(16)
Multilingual Services	0	(0)	0	(0)
Other	14	(26)	15	(29)

Note. Number in parenthesis reflects percentage of respondents answering each item. Respondents could choose more than one source.

Most families did not believe that anyone at the home school was pressuring them to stay or that anyone at the new school was pressuring them to transfer. Those families reporting pressure believed it was in regard to a decision to stay more than one related to changing to a new school. About 15 percent more families of students with disabilities (40% vs 25%) indicated they were pressured to stay.

Ratings of numbers of families indicating that student's behaviors and attitudes had improved as a result of participation in the Open Enrollment Program are presented in Table 12. Confidence in abilities, motivation to learn, academic performance, satisfaction with teachers and learning, and relations with friends were among the items checked by the most families of students with disabilities. Similar items were rated favorably by families of students without disabilities, but generally to a lesser extent than for families of students in special education.

Means and standard deviations for ratings of behavior changes are presented in Table 13. Families of students with disabilities reported significantly more improvement in academic performance than other families. Ratings of behavior changes in other areas were similar for both groups of respondents.

A comparison of family involvement in the schools before and after participation in the Open Enrollment Program is presented in Table 14. Involvement for both groups remained relatively constant after participating in the Open Enrollment Program. Attendance at school events and frequent teacher contacts were

Table 11

Comparison Of Pressures Involved In Decision To Transfer

Pressures	Families Of Students With Disabilities n = 60 n	%	Families Of Students Without Disabilities n = 59 n	%
Pressured To Stay At Former School				
YES	23	(40)	15	(25)
NO	35	(60)	44	(75)
Pressured To Change To New School				
YES	1	(2)	0	(0)
NO	59	(98)	59	(100)

Note. Number in parenthesis reflects percentage of respondents answering each item.

Table 12

Comparison Of Kinds Of Positive Behavior Change Associated With Making Decision To Transfer

Behaviors	Families Of Students With Disabilities n	%	Families Of Students Without Disabilities n	%
School Attendance	15	(29)	11	(24)
Study Time	21	(41)	22	(48)
Academic Performance	39	(74)	21	(47)
Motivation To Learn	39	(75)	28	(61)
Confidence In Abilities	40	(76)	32	(70)
Sense Of Responsibility	29	(57)	23	(50)
Relations With Friends	37	(69)	23	(50)
Athletics Participation	20	(40)	18	(40)
Extracurricular Participation	21	(42)	22	(50)
Time Spent With Family	10	(20)	9	(21)
Satisfaction With Teachers	34	(63)	23	(52)
Satisfaction With Learning	35	(66)	26	(58)
Higher Education Aspirations	27	(53)	24	(57)
Higher Career Aspirations	21	(44)	26	(62)
Other	13	(93)	8	(89)

Note. Number in parenthesis reflects percentage of respondents indicating positive behavior change. N is variable for each item due to respondents not indicating change for each behavior.

Table 13

Comparison Of Degree Of Behavior Change Associated With Making Decision To Transfer

Behaviors	Families Of Students With Disabilities Mean	SD	Families Of Students Without Disabilities Mean	SD
School Attendance	1.73	(.49)	1.78	(.47)
Study Time	1.61	(.53)	1.52	(.51)
Academic Performance	1.26	(.45)	1.53	(.51)*
Motivation To Learn	1.27	(.49)	1.39	(.49)
Confidence In Abilities	1.25	(.43)	1.30	(.47)
Sense Of Responsibility	1.45	(.54)	1.50	(.51)
Relations With Friends	1.35	(.56)	1.57	(.62)
Athletics Participation	1.60	(.50)	1.71	(.66)
Extracurricular Participation	1.62	(.57)	1.55	(.59)
Time Spent With Family	1.84	(.46)	1.82	(.45)
Satisfaction With Teachers	1.39	(.53)	1.50	(.55)
Satisfaction With Learning	1.36	(.52)	1.42	(.50)
Higher Education Aspirations	1.47	(.50)	1.43	(.50)
Higher Career Aspirations	1.56	(.50)	1.38	(.49)
Other	1.14	(.54)	1.11	(.33)

Note. Scale for each item ranged from 1=Has Improved to 3=Has Become Worse; significant differences between means indicated by *.

Table 14

Comparison Of Family Involvement In Schools

Involvement	Families Of Students With Disabilities n = 59 n	%	Families Of Students Without Disabilities n = 47 n	%
Before Transfer				
Participated In PTA	11	(19)	10	(21)
Volunteered Regularly	14	(24)	15	(32)
Attended School Events	42	(71)	37	(79)
Contacted Teachers Frequently	49	(83)	30	(64)
Committee Participation (District)	7	(12)	11	(23)
Committee Participation (School)	12	(20)	11	(23)
Occasional Involvement	21	(36)	16	(34)
Not Involved	9	(15)	8	(17)
After Transfer	n = 55		n = 55	
Participated In PTA	7	(13)	3	(6)
Volunteered Regularly	10	(18)	5	(9)
Attended School Events	47	(86)	43	(78)
Contacted Teachers Frequently	48	(87)	32	(58)
Committee Participation (District)	1	(2)	6	(11)
Committee Participation (School)	11	(20)	7	(13)
Occasional Involvement	28	(51)	22	(40)
Not Involved	2	(4)	5	(9)
Transportation Limits Involvement	9	(16)	13	(24)

Note. Number in parenthesis reflects percentage of respondents answering each item.

among the items checked by most families of students with disabilities before and after exercising open enrollment options.

Discussion

Since September, 1990 students in Minnesota have had the right to use open enrollment options to transfer school districts. During the 1990-91 academic year over 6,000 did so. Many students with disabilities transferred school districts. We examined the extent to which there are differences in the ways in which families of students with and without disabilities learn about open enrollment options, and we investigated the extent to which there are differences in experiences with open enrollment. Some differences were observed.

The most striking finding is the remarkable similarity in the two groups of families in how they learn about open enrollment, decide to transfer schools, and their experiences in doing so. The similarities between groups far outweigh differences. Yet, some differences were observed. The two groups of families stated similar reasons for transferring schools, but indicated a few significant differences. Families of students with disabilities indicated that they took advantage of open enrollment because they thought services would be better. Families of students without disabilities indicated that they transferred because of the strong academic reputations of the receiving schools/school districts. We were not surprised to learn that students transfer (or parents transfer students) in the hopes of obtaining a better educational program.

For the most part, families do not experience difficulties obtaining information about open enrollment. Yet, again we uncovered an important difference in how parents of students with and without disabilities get information. About twice as many families of students with disabilities experience difficulties obtaining information from the home school.

School personnel seldom participate in transfer decisions by families of students without disabilities, yet they are heavily involved in such decisions for students with disabilities. And, families of students with disabilities report that they often visited receiving school and talked to teachers in the process of making transfer decisions. It may be the case that school personnel get more involved in transfer of students with disabilities because transfer involves change in placement. Or, parents may seek the advice of school personnel in efforts to do what is best for their child with a disability.

Families of students with disabilities identify principals as the most valuable source of information about open enrollment more than twice as often as families of students without disabilities. Families of students who are not disabled learn about open enrollment from the media, students with disabilities from teachers and principals. Does this mean that students with disabilities are encouraged by school personnel to transfer schools? When asked, parents tell us that they are. Yet, we are unable to identify specifically the extent to which such requests or suggestions are intended to help the child, or to ease system

concerns. When parents are asked, some indicate the former, some the latter:

Do students who transfer schools improve their academic performance? Does their behavior improve? When parents were asked these questions, families of students with disabilities reported improvement in academic performance more often than families of students without disabilities. Yet, they rated changes in behaviors about the same. Transfer did not differentially affect parental involvement in schools.

Public school choice remains a key component of efforts to reform the American education system. To date, little research has been completed about choice or its effects on students and their families. This work provides a necessary foundation for addressing policy concerns related to improving education programs through choice and it provides needed information for improving the quality of educational services provided to students with disabilities.

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PUBLICATIONS

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Monograph 1 Open Enrollment and Students With Disabilities: Issues, Concerns, Fears, and Anticipated Benefits by J. E. Ysseldyke, M. L. Thurlow, B. Algozzine, & J. Nathan (October, 1991).

This paper presents a description of the implications of open enrollment for students with disabilities and for districts that gain or lose students with disabilities through transfer. The description is based on a review of the professional literature and on the results of an issues clarification working session attended by professionals, legislators, parents, and students. Three kinds of issues for districts and students have been identified: outcomes issues, implementation issues, and demographic issues. These are described in detail. Five major kinds of concerns reflected in debates about choice are also discussed: concern about pupil benefit, parent involvement (and convenience), teacher/administrator job protection, change, and teacher workload.

Research Report 1 Participation of Students with Disabilities and Special Needs in Postsecondary Enrollment Options by C. M. Lange, & J. E. Ysseldyke (November, 1991).

This report documents the participation of students with disabilities or special needs in Minnesota's Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO). PSEO allows students in 11th and 12th grade to take college and technical school courses for credit. The 77 participation postsecondary institutions were surveyed. Eight percent of the reported participants were students with disabilities or special needs with the majority being students with learning disabilities. However, all disability and special needs groups were represented. The majority of students with disabilities attended technical colleges. Implications for students with disabilities and their programs are discussed.

Research Report 2 Public School Choice: What About Students With Disabilities? by J. E. Ysseldyke, C. M. Lange, & B. Algozzine (November, 1991).

This report presents the results of a survey sent to Minnesota's Directors of Special Education asking them to identify the important issues and concerns relating to school choice options and special education. Excess program costs, the effects of enrollment options on the planning process (enrollment projections, staffing, variety of programs, etc.) and the billing of resident districts for special education services were found to be the most important issues. The Directors' concerns about the logistical problems with enrollment options and special education are discussed.

Research Report 3 Students with Disabilities Use of Various Options to Access Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers by D. J. Gorney, & J. E. Ysseldyke (January, 1992).

This report describes the participation of students with disabilities and special needs in two of Minnesota's enrollment options for at-risk students, Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers (ALC). Results indicate that students with disabilities are accessing Alternative School/ALC programs in ways similar to non-disabled students. Students with emotional/behavioral disorders are heavily represented in these schools. It was also discovered that when students enter these programs, special education labels are often dropped and services discontinued. Implications for special education are discussed.

Research Report 4 Participation of Different Categories of Students with Special Needs in Enrollment Options by J. E. Ysseldyke & C. M. Lange (January, 1992).

This report presents the results of a survey sent to a random sample of Minnesota's Directors of Special Education documenting the participation rates of students with disabilities in several of Minnesota enrollment option programs. A large majority of students with disabilities were found to be transferring school districts using tuition agreements. Students demonstrating emotional/behavioral disorders were found to be the largest disability group transferring schools. And, significant differences were found in participation rates between districts of differing enrollments.

Research Report 5 — Parents of Students with Disabilities and Open Enrollment: Characteristics and Reasons for Transfer by J. E. Ysseldyke, C. M. Lange, D. J. Gorney, & Y. Lau (April, 1992).

This report documents the characteristics of students with disabilities and special needs who participate in one of Minnesota's seven school choice options, open enrollment. Surveys were sent to the parents of all 1990-1991 open enrollment applicants who had indicated their child had a disability or special educational need. The reasons for participation, the sources of information, and the decision-making process involved with choosing another school are presented. How the reasons differ as a function of disability category, location, grade level, and parents' income level or education level are examined. Implications for policymakers, administrators, and teachers are discussed.

Research Report 6 — Looking at School Choice: Parents' Comments on Open Enrollment and Their Children with Disabilities by J. E. Ysseldyke, C. M. Lange, Y. Lau, & T. J. Delaney (May, 1992).

This report examines the qualitative comments shared by parents of students with disabilities and students served in gifted programs about one of Minnesota's seven school choice options, open enrollment. Surveys were sent to parents of 1990-1991 open enrollment applicants who had indicated their child had a disability or special educational need. The survey included a section for comments. Many parents included comments and these are analyzed in this report. The majority of the respondents reported satisfaction with the open enrollment program. Responses of students with disabilities and those served in gifted programs are compared as are those from rural and metropolitan areas.

Research Report 7 — School Choice Programs in the Fifty States by J. E. Ysseldyke, C. M. Lange, and T. J. Delaney (August, 1992).

This report documents the school choice programs available in each of the fifty states. These programs are generally of eight types: magnet schools, postsecondary enrollment programs, drop-out prevention programs, intradistrict open enrollment, interdistrict open enrollment, voucher programs, tuition agreement programs, and charter schools. A brief description of the school choice programs in each state is provided.

Research Report 8 — A Comparison of Families of Students With and Without Disabilities Who Use Open Enrollment Options to Transfer Schools by J. E. Ysseldyke, C. M. Lange, and B. Algozzine (August, 1992).

A cross-sectional survey was conducted to identify facts and opinions about selected aspects of contemporary practices related to the school choice option, open enrollment. Responses from families of students with disabilities were compared to responses of a similar group of families of students without disabilities who had transferred schools through the interdistrict transfer option in Minnesota called open enrollment. Information about the demographics, reasons for transfer, decision-making, source of information, and satisfaction of the respondents is presented. The differences between these two groups are examined and discussed.

Research Report 9 — Open Enrollment and Students With Disabilities: Where Are We and Where Are We Going? by J. E. Ysseldyke, C. M. Lange, and B. Algozzine (August, 1992).

This report examines the opinions of families of students with disabilities participating in one of Minnesota's school choice options, open enrollment. Results of a survey that included general demographic information, information sources, family decision-making related to open enrollment, and the effects of exercising the option on participating students are included. Results of this research suggest generally favorable responses for families of students with disabilities participating in this school choice program.